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SUBJECT: LOOKING IN THE CRYSTAL BALL: LEE MYUNG-BAK'S
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Classified By: POL Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: Past presidents have traditionally started their tenure by choosing academics or National Assembly members as their first foreign ministers, later replaced by career diplomats. The current bet among our MOFAT and campaign contacts is that Lee Myung-bak might decide to stick with a career diplomat initially. They note that Lee's key foreign policy advisors, such as Professors Kim Sung-han and Hyun In-taek, are too young to be chosen as the first round foreign minister. Also, there will be National Assembly elections in April, making it unattractive for politicians to give up their seats and become ineligible for another one for four years. If that is the case, career diplomat front-runners to head MOFAT include Yu Myung-hwan (Ambassador to Japan), Choi Young-jin (former Ambassador to the UN), Yim Sung-joon (former Ambassador to Canada) and Lee Kyu-hyung (Ambassador to Russia). We also believe several career diplomats in Lee's campaign, especially former FM Yoo Chong-ha, Kwon Jong-rak (former Ambassador to Ireland) and Park Dae-won (former Ambassador to Algeria) will play a role. End Summary.

MOFAT Past and Present

12. (SBU) During the last three administrations, first round foreign ministers have come either from academia or the legislature, and those serving as the administration's second foreign ministry heads have been career members of the diplomatic service:

-- President Kim Young-sam (1993-1997) appointed Han Sung-joo, a professor of political science at Korea University, as his first foreign minister. Han served until December 1994 when Kim replaced him with Gong Ro-myung, a career diplomat.

-- President Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) called upon National Assembly member Park Jung-soo as his first foreign minister. Park, with a passionate interest in foreign policy, had left the conservative GNP and joined Kim Dae-jung's campaign early on. Park did not last long, replaced by a career diplomat, Hong Soon-young.

-- President Roh (2003-2008) began his tenure by placing Yoon Young-kwan, a professor at Seoul National University, at the head of MOFAT. Yoon was followed in January of 2004 by

now-UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, a career diplomat who held the post until November 2006, when he was replaced by the current minister, Song Min-soon.

Lee Myung-bak's Potential Ministerial Picks

13. (C) In Korea, it is viewed as bad luck, not to mention in very bad taste, to begin to plan ahead for a victory that has not happened yet, so despite Lee's seemingly insurmountable lead in all polls, little has been said about his potential cabinet. However, based on patterns established by past presidents and the power structure of Lee's camp, several names arise as potential choices for Lee's chief foreign policy advisor.

-- Dr. Kim Sung-han: Kim has been a professor at Korea University's Graduate School of International Studies since September 2007 after a stint as head of IFANS, a think tank affiliated with MOFAT. He also provides counsel to the Ministry of National Defense, and the National Security Council, and is a specialist in U.S. foreign policy and international security. While he possesses an impressive resume, Dr. Kim is young (47 years old), and has relatively little direct government experience with foreign policy, deriving most of his expertise from his academic pursuits. He told poloff on December 10 that foreign policy should be run by MOFAT and the NSC and not by the National Intelligence Service (NIS) as has often been the case during Roh's administration. While NIS has an important role to play, Kim said, one of Lee's key goals was to return NIS to its proper secondary role in foreign policy making.

-- Dr. Hyun In-taek: Dr. Hyun is currently the president of Ilmin International Relations Institute at Korea University. He also serves as a policy advisor for the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Unification. Like Dr. Kim, Dr. Hyun has a vast wealth of academic knowledge in the field of foreign policy, but is also young and lacks first-hand government managerial experience.

14. (C) There is no lack for candidates among the politicians in Lee's camp, either. Many of their names are familiar, including National Assemblymen Park Jin, Gong Sung-jin and Chung Mong-joon. However, the opportunity cost for a sitting legislator to be in the cabinet may be prohibitively high, because they have to stay out of the National Assembly elections in April. So, given the average tenure of around twelve months in MOFAT, a majority of our contacts believe that a politician will not be Lee's first foreign minister. Some of them, however, predict that a politician, perhaps one with a great deal of political credit who fails to win a seat in April, could head MOFAT in the first cabinet reshuffle.

15. (C) Another reason for choosing a career diplomat to head MOFAT is the lower priority accorded to foreign affairs by Lee than the previous presidents. By far the highest priority for a Lee administration is the economy, especially creating job, stimulating growth and making the real estate market stabilize. A number of our contacts tell us that Lee would be quite content to let the diplomats handle foreign affairs, while he concentrates on revitalizing the economy. If this is the case, among the widely mentioned career MOFAT names are:

-- Yu Myung-hwan: Ambassador Yu was Vice Foreign Minister until he was posted to Japan as the Korean Ambassador when Song Min-soon took over as FM. Among the most senior South Korea diplomats respected widely in Seoul and outside, Yu was the runner-up in the FM sweepstakes last year when Song Min-soon beat him out. Therefore, many in MOFAT believe Yu is "owed."

-- Choi Young-jin: Ambassador Choi is currently the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Cote d'Ivoire. Before UNSYG picked him for that role, Choi was South Korea's COM to UN. He has also served as vice minister.

Many in MOFAT believe that Choi, like Yu Myung-hwan, is "owed," and that he was denied the FM position because of his conservative leaning and quite well-known criticisms of the Roh Moo-hyun administration.

-- Yim Sung-joon: Yim is a career diplomat who joined the foreign service in 1974. He was formerly the South Korean Ambassador to Canada, and currently serves as the President of the Korea Foundation. He also served as the Senior Secretary to the President for Foreign Policy and National

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Security under President Roh in 2002. Although Yim's reputation within MOFAT does not compare well with those of Yu Myung-hwan or Choi Young-jin, Yim apparently gets along well with politicians and some in the GNP are quite impressed with his extensive experience in the Blue House.

-- Lee Kyu-hyung: Lee is currently the South Korean Ambassador to Russia. He is a career diplomat who joined MOFAT in 1974. Lee has held several postings at the Korean Permanent Mission to the UN and has also served in South Korean Embassies in Japan, China, and Bangladesh. Lee has been a spokesman for MOFAT and served as the Vice Foreign Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2005. He was awarded the Order of Service Merit in 1992 and continues to receive accolades from his peers and others in political circles.

Returning From Siberia

16. (C) Technically, only the ministers and vice-ministers are classified as "political" appointments. Therefore, FM Song will definitely depart. The first vice-minister, Cho Joon-pyo, a career diplomat will most likely be given an ambassadorship abroad. The future of the other vice-minister, Kim Ho-young, mostly in charge of management and administration, is unsure as he has spent most of his career working in MOFAT in various administrative and

managerial capacities. The only other official in MOFAT with a vice-minister's rank is Chun Yung-woo, Special Representative to the Six Party Talks. We understand that Chun would very much like to remain in his current position. Some in MOFAT give him a fighting chance to do so because the talks have gone well and also because Chun is from Busan, a key GNP stronghold. Also helpful is that Chun is the most prominent graduate in the government of Busan University, a valuable diversity credit for MOFAT which is completely dominated by the graduates of Seoul National University.

17. (C) We also expect some familiar names to return from their exiles. The most important might be Kwon Jong-rak, who resigned from MOFAT several months before to join Lee Myung-bak's campaign. Kwon, previously in Kim Young-sam's Blue House, and who ended his diplomatic career as Ambassador to Ireland, is seen as a victim of his close ties to the conservatives. Another is Park Dae-won, who was the first career diplomat to quit his job and join the campaign. Kwon and Park hail from Pohang, Lee's home town; they will most probably seek a position in Lee's Blue House. Not seeking any such position is Yoo Chong-ha, FM under Kim Young-sam, now heading the campaign's foreign policy team. Yoo will likely play the role of the informal senior advisor.

Lee Quiet On Cabinet Organization

10. (C) All of the above is, of course, mostly informed guess work, because Lee has not released any information, even among his inner circle, about his choices for his cabinet. For now, Lee's task is to build a large campaign without alienating anyone. He wants all members of his camp to continue working hard until the presidential election is over. We also understand that Lee does not make personnel

decisions easily, which probably means he will take some time
to name key transition team officials.
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